

Key Elements of Running a Successful Nontraditional Employment Orientation

Paint a picture of a variety of nontraditional jobs for the women in your workshop. Include specifics, such as job titles, salaries of entry-level and experienced workers, benefits, and a description of the types of duties of a particular job. Rather than simply stating that nontraditional jobs pay 20-30 percent more than traditional jobs, elaborate on the types of job opportunities available locally. Videos, posters and brochures that help to build the visual picture are useful tools for this goal.

For example: “There are women graduates of our program employed as utility workers with the county who started off earning \$7.05 - \$8.99 an hour. After six months on the job, these women earn \$10.25 an hour. Public works types of jobs in our area offer good health care benefits also. The title of “utility worker” covers a lot of different types of jobs, including street repairers and sewage and solid waste workers.”

Draw out skills that are transferable to nontraditional jobs. While the majority of women have never thought about doing nontraditional work and do not have paid work experience in a nontraditional job, one-third or more probably have skills or interests that are transferable to nontraditional work. You can draw out some of these transferable skills by having your workshop participants complete Wider Opportunities for Women’s Nontraditional Career Assessment Survey (see Appendix or the Resource Disks), and by asking specific questions throughout the workshop.

For example: “Do any of you sew? (raise hands) Did you know that following a sewing pattern requires the same skills as reading blueprints that welders use or the schematic drawings that copy machine repair technicians read? When you are reading a sewing pattern or a blueprint, you are doing the same thing. You are actually looking at something in two dimensions and putting it in three dimensions.”

Dispel the myths of nontraditional jobs and women. It is important to address societal stereotypes of nontraditional work and to acknowledge both the benefits and barriers to nontraditional employment.

For example: “Society has stereotypes about women who work in nontraditional jobs. What do you think some of the barriers are for women working in nontraditional jobs?” (Solicit answers from participants and write them on poster paper. Some examples are sexual harassment, isolation, resistance from family and friends, physically demanding work, and scheduling shift work. Then dispel the myths of each one.) “What are some of the benefits of nontraditional work?” (Points to include are higher pay, benefits, sense of satisfaction, more enjoyable work for some women, career ladders, and the ability to work outdoors.)

Feature tradeswomen role models or a video showing women working in nontraditional jobs. Women are more likely to envision themselves doing a nontraditional job if they meet or see other women in nontraditional fields.

If possible, have a tradeswoman conduct your workshop or invite a panel of tradeswomen - preferably working in the fields in which you have training available - to speak about their experiences on the job.

A video that shows a variety of women in nontraditional work can supplement the tradeswoman's presentation.

Provide an accurate and diverse description of the job market. Many people think nontraditional jobs for women are just in construction and manufacturing - industries that are declining in some areas. It is important to convey the message that there are job opportunities available in a variety of occupational areas in which you offer training or could arrange on-the-job training contracts.

For example: "We recently placed women with KB Office Machine Repair and Ingrich Trucking Company. In addition, a new machine tooling factory is locating here and has informed us that they have 10 slots open for welders and 20 slots for machine tooling. Of course we cannot guarantee you a job there, but we do presently offer training in both of these occupations which would enable you to apply and be well qualified for an entry-level position."

Alleviate women's fears about the skills needed for nontraditional jobs. Many women will be concerned about the level of math skills and other vocational skills such as tool identification or blueprint reading required for technical occupations. It is important to let women know what programs and tutorial help are available to brush up on math skills or gain proficiency in skills required in nontraditional jobs. Be sure to offer the details of a prevocational skills course if your program offers or has access to one.

For example: "Many of you may not have taken a math class in a while or may be uncomfortable about applying for positions which require math or a knowledge of tools. A lot of women who are now successfully employed in nontraditional jobs were apprehensive about this at first, too. We offer prevocational workshops designed to help prepare you for the realities of nontraditional work. They include an introduction to several high-demand occupations in our area, math skills, tool identification and use, safety on the job, physical conditioning, and skills for success on the job. We can put you in touch with recent graduates of our program to give you a better idea of what the program is like. The next program cycle begins in three weeks. The local high school also offers a math brush-up course, which is free and scheduled in the evening for adults. They have monthly orientations describing their programs."

Emphasize that your locale offers training for high-skill, high wage jobs. The emphasis should not be on the fact that these jobs are considered “nontraditional” for women, which may discourage some women from entering training. Your audience is also not likely to be interested in a discussion of nontraditional grants or legislation that made the program possible. They want specific details about the type of training offered, when the programs start, what the costs are, etc.

Address participants’ concerns about sexual harassment in a male-dominated workplace. While it is true that women can experience sexual harassment in any work environment, it can be especially difficult in an environment where there are few women on the job. Therefore, it is important to provide information on how to address sexual harassment.

For example: “Yes, unfortunately women in any occupation or workplace may face sexual harassment. We work to prepare women for this possibility. Our program provides instruction on women’s legal rights on the job and techniques to prevent and diffuse sexual harassment in a male-dominated environment. We also work with employers and unions to lessen the likelihood that you will face harassment.”

Create a relaxed, interactive atmosphere. Encourage the women to ask questions and speak among themselves about the information being presented. Often, women can best relate to another’s experiences and feel more enthusiastic when they know others want to do nontraditional work. You may wish to begin the workshop with ice-breakers or ask questions related to nontraditional employment to encourage participation. Tradeswomen panels often help stimulate lively discussions in introductory NTO workshops. If you plan to show a video, prepare questions for discussion after the video.

Sample questions: “How many of you have had a nontraditional job before?” “How many of you have a woman in your family who has had a nontraditional job?” “What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of nontraditional employment?”

Provide information about available supportive services, such as tradeswomen’s support groups. Women in nontraditional jobs often face isolation and harassment, and they can get the support they need from women in similar circumstances. Be sure to mention the time and place of tradeswomen support meetings.

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